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SUBJECT: EMBASSIES PRAISE ROKG ANTI-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS

REF: SEOUL 01419

Classified By: POL M/C James L. Wayman. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: The Korean Government has established a strong track record of cooperation with the United States, Canada, and Australia on anti-trafficking efforts. In an attempt to gauge ROKG cooperation with other countries on trafficking issues, poloff met with representatives from the Mongolian, Philippine, and Thai Embassies in Seoul and with Korean officials from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs (MHWF), which works closely with these embassies. All three embassies reported excellent cooperation with ROKG officials and the Korean National Police Agency (KNPA). All said their nationals were at minimal risk of being subjected to either sex or labor trafficking violations, but, nonetheless, reported on new efforts to continue to stay ahead of the issue. Korean officials explained to poloff new inter-governmental cooperative efforts aimed at the issue of an increasing number of foreign wives marrying Korean men, which the ROKG has begun calling the "multicultural family" issue, in an effort to capture a more holistic approach to this increasing trend (reftel). END SUMMARY.

Mongolia

¶12. (C) Poloff met with First Secretary Buren-Erdene Khuldorj of the Mongolian Embassy regarding trafficking issues as related to Mongolian nationals in Korea and the degree of cooperation the Korean National Police (KNPA) provides. Buren-Erdene said that law enforcement cooperation between Mongolia and Korea was excellent -- "the best in Asia" -- and that there were several new initiatives that further enhanced cooperation. Starting this year, the KNPA sent police officers to the National University in Mongolia for training. The KNPA has also set up a branch office in Mongolia, and there is now a Mongolian police official training with KNPA.

¶13. (C) There have been trafficking cases involving the sizeable Mongolian community in Korea, but overall embassy officers said problems were isolated incidents. Buren-Erdene said there were about 37,000 Mongolians in Korea -- about 17,000 were legal workers, 2,000 were students, and 2,400 were in country through marriage. Isolated incidents of trafficking cases included one case involving fraud -- 2 women were brought to Korea under false pretenses. The Mongolian and Korean police raided the establishment and made arrests. The two women were sent back to Mongolia, but the embassy could not provide any information about the circumstances. Buren-Erdene said they had also received some reports of illegal workers facing threats of violence and

withheld passports, but these were few in number.

Buren-Erdene had high-praise for Korea's Employment Placement System (EPS), the mechanism that regulates the entry of migrant workers into Korea. Mongolia was one of the first countries to participate in the program. There are now new initiatives, Buren-Erdene said, to enable EPS alums to work at Korean companies in Mongolia. The system is mutually beneficial, he said.

Philippines

¶4. (C) Philippine Embassy Consul General Sylvia Marasigan told poloff that the ROKG has been very helpful and worked very well with the Philippine government on trafficking issues. They needed help, however, better understanding what needed to be done. Once it was pointed out to them, Marasigan said, the ROKG worked quickly to make it happen. As an example, Marasigan cited a recent ROKG initiative to bring officials from the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam to Korea for a training conference to exchange information on legal issues surrounding foreign wives who marry Korean men. The Philippine government had invited Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs (MHWF) Multicultural Families Division Director Lee Min-won to visit the Philippines to witness training efforts there. According to Marasigan the visit had convinced Lee that the ROKG needed to be more proactive about training foreign women who planned to marry Korean men.

¶5. (C) Marasigan said the embassy had seen no evidence that foreign wives were being trafficked. She felt there was much the ROKG could do, however, to improve the lives of foreign wives living in Korea. She suggested that there needed to be more follow-up with these women, many of whom ended up residing in rural Korea. Support centers should make sure they visited these women, Marasigan said, because sometimes their families would not let them travel to the nearest support center. When there were suspicions of trafficking, Marasigan said the ROKG was willing to issue G-1 visas to victims to enable them to stay in Korea during the investigation and trial. The G-1 visa was problematic, however, because it did not allow the victims to work.

Thailand

¶6. (C) Pornpong Kanittanon, Minister-Counselor at the Thai Embassy, told poloff that there were roughly 45,000 Thai workers in Korea, most of whom entered through the EPS system, which he said worked very well. The Thai Embassy estimated there were an additional 13,000 illegal workers -- mostly in small factories and in agriculture. Pornpong said complaints from this community were minimal and Thai nationals were not subjected to serious trafficking offenses.

Pornpong said about 3,000 Thai women had married to Korean men -- a number he thought might grow because of the economic difficulties in Thailand. He said there were some cases of the women working in massage parlors or as prostitutes after they arrived in Korea. Pornpong emphasized that they had not had reports of this work being forced upon the women, but rather he believed the women willingly entered into these establishments to earn more money.

¶7. (C) The Thai Embassy said the Korean police were very cooperative and responsive to reports of criminal activities involving Thai citizens. Pornpong said that he could not be sure how many of the cases ended up with charges filed, but he said the KNPA always seemed very responsive. As a means of gauging the number of Koreans engaging in child sex tourism in Thailand, poloff inquired about the existence of sex tours to Thailand. Pornpong said there used to be many, but the Thai government had cracked down in recent years. There were sometimes cases but the phenomenon, he said, was not widespread.

ROKG's New Training Initiative

¶18. (C) Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs (MHWF) Multicultural Families Division Director Lee Min-won explained to poloff a newly-launched ROKG program to bring officials from Mongolia, Vietnam, and the Philippines to Korea for a conference about Korean law governing international marriages. The ministry intended to make this an annual event.

¶19. (C) The ROKG already hosts one-to-two day orientation programs for foreign women who intend to marry Korean men in Mongolia, Vietnam and the Philippines and will be starting a similar program with Cambodia towards the end of the year. The elective in-country training focused on Korean culture and society and was intended to provide a better understanding of the environment women were marrying into. The Philippines already had its own training program, which the Korean government participated in by providing textbooks and lecturers. The Vietnamese and Mongolian governments had no such programs, so orientation there was wholly sponsored by the Korean government.

¶110. (C) Lee said that 30 percent of foreign wives in Korea were Korean-Chinese and another 20 percent were Chinese. Initially foreign marriage was a rural phenomenon, Lee said, but it was now prevalent among lower income groups in cities as well. Lee advocated multicultural training for men who planned to marry foreign women and said, as an incentive, the government could shorten the waiting period for foreign wives coming to Korea. The recently-enacted Marriage Brokers Act forces brokers to register and mandates human rights training. There are bad brokers, Lee said, and the law allows the ROKG to revoke licenses, levy fines, and imprison dishonest brokers. Lee anticipated that, starting next year, some brokers would be penalized with jail terms.

STEPHENS